



The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, hosted a delegation from the Orthodox Church of Greece at Lambeth Palace this week.

Archbishop Justin welcomed the delegation, which comprised representatives of His Beatitude Hieronymos II, Archbishop of Athens and All Greece, and members of the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church of Greece, to Lambeth on Monday.

The two-day visit, which concluded on Wednesday morning, was a celebration and affirmation of the relationship between the Church of England and the Church of Greece down the centuries and into the present. It also provided a springboard for more intimate and deeper working relationships in the future.

The programme aimed to help members of both churches learn more about each other's situations and share good practice in areas of common concern – including poverty, homelessness, youth employment, austerity, migration and refugees, and European uncertainty. It included opportunities for the Greek delegation to see the work of local churches and church schools.

At St Gabriel's College, Camberwell and at St Peter's CE School in Walworth, delegates were able to experience the work of Church of England supporting families and communities facing immediate problems of poverty, social exclusion and housing needs.

The two delegations were able to share the experiences of churches in London and Athens working in partnership with charity and community organisations to serve the most needy in society. St Gabriel's College is one of the first 'Refugees Welcome' schools.

During their visit, some of the delegation also met with resident members of the Community of St Anselm, the monastic-inspired community for young Christians of different denominations from around the world based at Lambeth Palace, which was founded by Archbishop Justin in September 2015. The residents told the delegation about their shared life of prayer, study and service among the most vulnerable in society, and learned about the Greek delegation's long experience of social engagement steeped in monastic traditions.

The Archbishop of Athens' delegation was HE Metropolitan Athenagoras; HE Metropolitan Gabriel; Mr Constantine Dimtsas; Archimandrite Ignatios Sotiriadis and the Revd Deacon Alexios Kourtesis.

The Archbishop of Canterbury's delegation comprised Bishop Nigel Stock; Bishop Christopher Chessun; Bishop Jonathan Goodall; the Revd Canon Malcolm Bradshaw and the Revd Dr Will Adam.

Welcoming the delegation, Archbishop Justin noted the pressures that the economic uncertainty of the last decade has placed on the people served by their respective churches. He also spoke of how much of the pressure of receiving many thousands of refugees and migrants fleeing war in the Middle East has fallen on Greece.

The Archbishop said: "Your Eminences, dear friends, we are here in these challenging times as brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ. The

blessed Apostle Paul wrote in his Epistle to the Philippians 'I can do all things through him who strengthens me.' As we face challenges together in Christ we hear the words of his apostle echoing across the continents and down the centuries. We can do all things in Christ, who strengthens us in his service.

"Your visit to us is a joy. We pray that God would bless us and, in his reconciling love for us, draw us ever closer in fellowship as we seek to do his will."

On Monday, Archbishop Justin joined the delegation for a service of Choral Evensong at Southwark Cathedral. During the service a greeting from the Archbishop of Athens was delivered by Metropolitan Athenagoras.

Responding to the message, Archbishop Justin spoke of the shared understanding among Anglican and Orthodox churches that "human beings are created according to the image of divine Trinitarian love" and of "our call to relate to others in accordance with their full worth".

Quoting from the 2015 'Buffalo Statement' by the International Commission for Anglican-Orthodox Theological Dialogue, Archbishop Justin said this understanding "entails from time to time the call 'to take prophetic and practical action in relation to the critical issues facing our societies.'"

He added: "This is a difficult task. And I pray that we might continue to pray for one another, to talk to one another and to support one another in our ministry to help those most in need."

On Tuesday at Lambeth Palace, Archbishop Justin introduced a seminar called 'Serving the common good in a time of austerity and uncertainty', highlighting some of the social and economic challenges that the Church of England is involved in tackling. The Greek delegation gave a presentation on their country's own social and economic challenges and how the Church there is responding.

The seminar was attended by representatives of Christian agencies and social care policy bodies and provided an opportunity for people and organisations operating in similar fields to meet together. The Greek delegation asked for prayer for Greece as it faces a continued economic crisis and for practical support for the work of the church in helping those at the margins of Greek society and the thousands of refugees still arriving daily.

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